

# School/work gap

## Students not learning right things, study says

BY TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Business must help educators and union leaders set skill standards for students headed for the work force, says a study prepared for Michigan legislators.

Reason: "There is a growing gap between what students learn and what is expected of them in the workplace," according to the key finding of House Speaker Lewis Dodak's Blue Ribbon Commission on Career-Technical Education.

Although the name of Dodak, D. Birch Run, tops the report, the commission was chaired by Rep. William Keith, D-Grand Haven. Its recommendation is embodied in Keith's House Bill 4165, which would establish a state Cabinet on Professional and Technical Standards.

The bill also requires a 200-day school year beginning in September 1993. Those that continue to offer

### EDUCATION

the 180-day year, standard since the 1950s, would lose a proportionate amount of state aid.

The panel noted Japanese students are in class 242 days a year and 41.6 hours a week, and high school graduates have six years of English. Some 250 million Chinese speak fluent English — "more than the U.S. population," the commission said.

The work of Philip H. Power, board chairman of Suburban Communications Corp. and University of Michigan regent, is evident in this recommendation: "The focus of education must be on the achievement of 'competencies' and 'mastery of skills' that students will need in the 21st century. We can no longer afford to graduate students or adults based on seat time. The emphasis must be on outcomes

achieved rather than on courses taken."

Another influence was New York state educator Willard Daggett, who argues that reading and math teaching must be revised to suit the workplace rather than academia. A key section summarizes Daggett's speech in Lansing:

"In the service sector, ATM (automatic teller machines) have reduced the number of bank tellers and cashiers by 40 percent in the last five years and may replace another 40 percent in the next five years."

"Auto mechanics have evolved into auto technicians, with diagnostic equipment and computerized technical manuals being the new tools of the trade. In 1965 the average automobile service manual was 300 pages... (The manual for a 1991 car exceeds 475,000 pages.)

"Similarly, advanced automation is being tested in some fast food

restaurants, which could reduce or even eliminate the need for grill and counter personnel."

Business members of the panel include, besides Power: Berget Kloha, Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce; Jeff Hearn, a VP of Champion International Inc.; Renee Lerche, manager of education for Ford Motor Co.; and Sharon Roy, S.R. Accounting, Inc.

The state AFL-CIO was represented by Bruce Stine. Educators included Clyde LeTarte, president of Jackson Community College; Betty Ong, Royal Oak vocational education teacher; and Lola Jackson, the state's director of vocational education.

The job of pulling together employers' shopping lists of skills would fall to a 15-member cabinet-level body.

The governor would appoint three members representing business, education and organized labor.

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